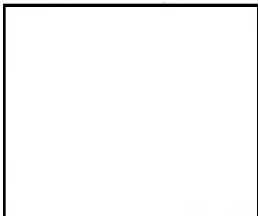


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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
10 May 1963

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CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Baathist-Nasir Struggle in Syria

1. Both Nasir and the Baathists want to unify the Arab states under revolutionary socialist leadership. To the politically conscious Arab, political unity seems the touchstone by which the Arabs will recover their full dignity and independence--lost first to the Ottoman Turks and subsequently to the Western powers. Both the Baathists and Nasir subscribe to a neutralist foreign policy.

2. Arab socialism, a combination of Arab nationalism and socialism, is aimed at "social justice" by nationalization of commerce and industry owned by both Western interests and the Arab upper class. In the Nasir and Baath scheme of things there is no room for the traditional political leadership of landlords, merchants, and bankers. The Arab nationalists, however, have been incapable of developing a political framework for bringing their objectives about.

3. The Baathists and Nasir differ over the roles of leadership and parties in a unified Arab state. Nasir insists on a monolithic party system controlled by himself, while the Baath--an international Arab movement founded in 1953--is committed to the idea of freedom of political activity by all leftist parties and groupings, except the Communists. Baathism has been described as "Nasirism without Nasir."

4. Baathist-Nasir relations go back to the years 1955-58 when they were allied against the old oligarchy in Syria. When the Communists became a serious threat in late 1957 Syrian Baathist leaders rushed to Cairo to beg Nasir to unite the two countries. Nasir agreed only after Baath agreement to make Syria an integral part of his domain.

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5. Nasir then proceeded to liquidate all Syrian parties, including the Baath, and this was one of the actions that eventually led to Syria's break away from Egypt in September 1961. With this experience impressed on their memory, Baathist leaders are bitterly opposed to allowing Nasir to get into a position where he could repeat the process.

6. Nevertheless, Iraqi and Syrian Baathist leaders went to Cairo in late March to discuss union with Nasir because they found themselves prisoners of their own propaganda for the emotional concept of Arab unity. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] The Baathists had great reservations on approaching Nasir because they feared his authoritarianism, and the federated Arab state was announced on 17 April only after a month's bickering over the forms of union. The crucial negotiations over how the union's institutions were to work were put off. The vision was that military and foreign affairs would be unified first, followed gradually by other political and, finally, economic institutions, while a plebiscite would be held to formalize Nasir's assumption of the presidency.

7. Both the Iraqi and Syrian Baathists are trying now to build up their strength to the point where they can resist power grabs by Nasir and his followers as these steps occur. The present Syrian crisis is a product of this struggle.

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